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“CHILDREN ACT FAST...SO DO POISONS!”

NATIONAL POISON PREVENTION WEEK 19-25 MARCH 2000

Do young children live in your household? Do young children ever visit your household? Do you ever visit homes where young children live? If you respond “yes” to any of these questions, read further to learn what you can do to protect the health of the children in your life.



National Poison Prevention Week is celebrated from the 19-25 March 2000. This annual event is an important time to remind parents, teachers and childcare providers to be mindful of the poisons, which endanger children in our society. It is also a time to recognize the accomplishments of consumers, industry and government in reducing childhood poisonings. Particularly noteworthy was the passing of Poison Prevention Packaging Act in 1972, which required child-resistant packaging for aspirin and other oral prescription medicines. It is estimated that the lives of 700 children have been saved due to that one act. Other efforts continue to raise awareness to the dangers of accidental poisonings and preventive measures directed at controlling these dangers. This year's theme “Children Act Fast...So Do Poisons” emphasizes the need that all adults: parents, grandparents, baby-sitters, must always be watchful when household chemicals or drugs are being used or present in the home.

What children are at risk of accidental poisoning? Although all children are at-risk of ingesting poisonous substances, children six years old and younger are most at-risk because they are in the stages of growth and development in which they are constantly exploring and investigating the world around them. Children like the attractive packaging, good smells and are drawn to the colorful substances of many of the products found around the home. Things that glitter...pretty colored pills...bottles and containers of all kinds! These items arouse their natural curiosity. This is a normal characteristic and should not be discouraged by adults, rather anticipated and planned for. As youngsters grow, they become more mobile, innovative and resourceful. A crawling child may obtain household products stored under the kitchen sink or on the floor. Store these products in a higher location unless the kitchen cabinet is locked or secured with child safety latches. Once small children can stand and walk, products, such as furniture polish on low-lying tables and purses containing pill bottles on beds, are now reachable. Lock up or store poisonous substances out of reach and never leave them unattended while in use. Children act fast and can grab, open and swallow the substance in the time it takes to answer the doorbell or phone. When children start

climbing, counter tops and open medicine cabinets become achievable goals! Find a shelf that is completely beyond the child's ability to reach or better yet, lock these products in a cabinet or closet.

If the container has child-resistant packaging do I still need to keep it out of reach? Child-resistant packaging is only an additional barrier. Children will investigate different ways to open a container. If fingers don't work, teeth might! And while it is true that deaths from ingestions due to household products and medicines, especially aspirin, have shown a steady decline since the advent of the child-resistant packaging in 1972, it is not childproof. The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission requires that this packaging prevent 80% of children under the age of five from opening the container during a 10-minute test. That means that some children may still be able to open the container and obtain a toxic amount. Child-resistant packaging is required for many household products and medicines such as aspirin, liquid furniture polish, drain and oven cleaners, pesticides, oral prescription drugs and some over the counter medicines to include ibuprofen and mouthwash containing 3 grams of alcohol.

Remember Child-resistant does not mean Childproof.

As an older adult not having small children in the home do I still need to use childproof packaging? You may be surprised to know that grandparent's medicine is involved in about 20 percent of accidental drug ingestions by children. Poisonings have occurred when older persons carried medicines into homes that have small children and when youngsters have visited homes where no children live. Adults have left medicine bottle caps loose or off because they are hard to open. Medicines we need as we get older to allow us to live longer, more productive lives are extremely dangerous to youngsters can take the lives of our children or grandchildren. Some blood pressure and diabetes medicines are so dangerous that one tablet may cause a child to be hospitalized in intensive care for twenty-four hours, at risk for seizures, coma and death. Purchaser of prescriptions can request regular, non-child resistant packaging. Keep this practice to a minimum because it increases the danger of childhood poisoning.